

Ms. Marlene Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW, Room CY-B402
Washington, DC 20554

RE: *Application of SBC, Pursuant to Section 271 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 for Authorization To Provide In-Region, InterLATA Services in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin, WC Docket No. 03-167*

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Senior Services Associates, Inc. is a non-profit agency serving 15,000 seniors each year in Illinois. We target the frail elderly with limited income. As such we are acutely aware of the financial challenges faced by seniors. We are also aware of the importance of telephone service to the senior. It protects them from being isolated and is necessary in case of emergency. As such it is extremely important that rates be as low as possible.

We know that competition affects rates; consequently we feel it's time to allow SBC into the long distance marketplace in Illinois so it can offer the same services as it's competitors. The regulatory process leading to this decision is excruciatingly slow and puts both SBC and Illinois consumers at real disadvantage. Meanwhile, Illinois' long distance customers continue to pay higher and higher long distance bills.

Senior citizens around the country and in our state are struggling to meet their financial obligations as interest income on investments shrink while costs continue to rise. The FCC holds the key to lowering long distance costs to seniors by simply allowing SBC to provide long distance services to it's customers and compete on a level playing field with the scores of other telecom providers in Illinois.

As customers in 43 other states have discovered, when the local phone company enters into the long distance market, prices almost immediately fall. Adding another competitor to Illinois' long distance market would help to facilitate true competition in the marketplace.

The people of Illinois, and particularly senior citizens hoping to stay in touch with their families, deserve better. We deserve more choices in long distance providers and the convenience of one-stop shopping for all our telecommunication needs; we deserve better service and lower prices that result from a truly competitive marketplace. Customers should have the ability to pick whichever company they want, including SBC, for local and long distance telephone service.

The time has come to open the last closed market in the telecommunications industry. It is time to allow the people of Illinois the freedom to choose who will provide truly competitive telecommunication services. Free competition and free choice benefit all. Without competition, no one wins.

Thank you for consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

Betty Schoenholtz
Executive Director